

Cohesive Wildfire Management Strategy Briefing Paper

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Background

There is a renewed desire to develop collaborative solutions to the growing wildfire problems in the U.S. within the wildland fire community and among policy making officials at all levels. In response to this call to action, the Federal Land Assistance Management & Enhancement Act (FLAME Act) of 2009 directs the Department of Agriculture and Department of Interior to develop a Cohesive Wildfire Management Strategy. The Secretaries recognize that this is a national issue that must be addressed collaboratively with the entire wildland fire community. The Cohesive Strategy will specifically address:

- Cost-effective allocations of fire management budget resources
- Reinvestment in non-fire programs
- Assess risk to communities
- Appropriate fire response
- Prioritize fuels project funding
- Assess impacts of climate change on wildfires
- Study effects of invasive species on wildfire risk

At the same time, the Cohesive Strategy will address three Government Accountability Office (GAO) concerns:

- Lay out various potential approaches for addressing the growing wildland fire threat;
- Estimate the costs associated with each approach; and
- Describe the trade-offs involved with each approach.

The development and coordination of this Cohesive Strategy is being led by the Wildland Fire Leadership Council (WFLC), which has appointed a “Cohesive Strategy Oversight Committee” (CSOC). The Cohesive Strategy is a national collaborative effort between wildland fire organizations, land managers, and policy making officials representing federal, state and local governments, tribal interests, and non-governmental organizations. Fifteen forums were held nationwide where more than 400 participants discussed their concerns about land management and the risk of wildfire. The input from the forums will be included in the Cohesive Strategy.

Goals of the Cohesive Strategy

The Cohesive Strategy will build on the successes of the National Fire Plan and other foundational documents, including the *10-Year Comprehensive Strategy and Implementation Plan*, *Quadrennial Fire Review 2009*, *A Call to Action*, *Wildland Fire Protection and Response in the United States*, *the Responsibilities, Authorities and Roles of Federal, State, Local and Tribal Government (Missions Report)*, and *Mutual Expectations for Preparedness and Suppression in the Interface*. The new Cohesive Strategy will address the nation's wildfire problems by focusing on three key areas:

- Restore and Maintain Landscapes – Landscapes across all jurisdictions are resilient to disturbances in accordance with management objectives.
- Fire Adapted Communities – Human populations and infrastructure can survive a wildland fire. Communities can assess the level of wildfire risk to their communities and share responsibility for mitigating both the threat and the consequences.
- Response to Fire – All jurisdictions participate in making and implementing safe, effective, efficient risk-based wildland fire management decisions.

A Phased Approach

The Cohesive Strategy will evaluate wildfire risk across the country and will identify priority regional strategies to meet wildland fire goals by using the best available scientific methods. The Cohesive Strategy will be developed and implemented over time, and its landscape analysis method will be adaptable to different geographic scales – national, regional and local.

- Phase 1 –Develop a report to Congress that responds to the FLAME Act questions and GAO recommendation. The report will include the Cohesive Wildfire Management Strategy which outlines the process and timeline, and will be presented to Congress by November 1, 2010.
- Phase 2 –Utilizing the process outlined in Phase 1, regions will identify values, conduct regional risk assessments and develop strategies to effectively meet local, regional and national goals.
- Phase 3 – Roll up regional strategies into a national strategy that identifies values, risk and priority strategies that would mitigate risk to communities and landscapes and provide an effective wildfire response capability. Execute the priority strategies, monitor, evaluate and adapt.

For more information and links to the foundational documents, please go to www.forestsandangelands.gov or contact Kirk Rowdabaugh, Director, Department of Interior, Office of Wildland Fire Coordination at Kirk_Rowdabaugh@ios.doi.gov or Tom Harbour, Director, USDA Forest Service, Fire and Aviation Management at tharbour@fs.fed.us, or Dan Smith, Fire Director, National Association of State Foresters at Dan_Smith@nifc.blm.gov